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2003

Connect

August

Allergic reactions deterred with food industry education

For people with food allergies, simply shopping for groceries can be scary — and time consuming.

"It takes them about 10 times longer in the grocery store because they have to read every label," said Sue Hefle, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension food safety specialist and co-director of the Food Allergy Research and Resource Program (FARRP) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Even then, labels sometimes don't clearly list an allergenic food, so "it's very scary."

FARRP, formed in 1995, provides educational training to food industry professionals, ultimately to prevent consumers from having allergic reactions to food.

Hefle and Steve Taylor, head of the Department of Food Science and Technology at UNL and FARRP's other co-director, developed the program at the request of food industry leaders. It is the only one worldwide to teach about food allergies to members of the food industry, dietitians, government representatives and others from around the world, Hefle said.

The two-day training course takes

place two to three times a year, usually in Chicago, although it has been offered in Switzerland and Australia. Speakers include representatives of major food companies such as Kellogg Co., Campbell Soup Co., Kraft Foods Inc. and General Mills Inc.

Training highlights include scientific aspects of food allergies, food recalls, labeling laws, consumer concerns and allergen control.

The training includes how to sanitize manufacturing equipment to avoid cross-contamination of food, Hefle said. For example, equipment used to make peanut butter cookies must be thoroughly cleaned before it is used to make sugar cookies to remove any traces of peanuts, one of eight foods considered highly allergenic, she said.

Other highly allergenic foods include nuts, eggs, milk, wheat, soybeans, fish and shellfish, which cause 90 percent to 95 percent of allergic reactions, Hefle said. Reactions can include hives, swollen throats, breathing difficulty and shock. In the most extreme cases, a person could die within 15 minutes, she said.

Hefle's lab has developed test kits to detect cross-contamination on manufacturing equipment. UNL has partnered with Neogen Corp. in Lansing, Mich., to sell the kit.

More than 100 food industry representatives attending the November training changed a manufacturing process and estimated saving \$500,000 in potential recall costs, Hefle said.

George Dunaif, senior director of Toxicology & Analytical Services at Campbell Soup in Camden, N.J., and a



Brett Hampton

Sue Hefle, NU Cooperative Extension food safety specialist, educates food industry professionals about allergens, and helped develop test kits to detect cross-contamination of food during manufacturing.

course instructor, teaches about food packaging and proper scheduling for food manufacturing. Extension's course is helpful because it addresses the scientific, regulatory, legal and practical aspects of dealing with food allergens, he said.

"I think it's tremendous," he said. "You walk out of the meeting and you have a good, basic understanding of the challenges you face in managing this issue. People's lives depend on it."

— Lori McGinnis

Hefle can be contacted at (402) 472-4430.

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Dean's comments

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins, the author, suggests we should never settle for "good" — as good as that is — but constantly strive for great. It's that vision, direction and striving that get us there, and keep us improving.

To settle for being "good" at what we do, Collins warns, is tantamount to complacency. The corporate world cannot afford complacency because that can lead to backsliding, buyouts and takeovers, Collins notes, with stakeholders bearing the loss.

I'd add University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension cannot afford complacency, either, because we owe our stakeholders, our constituents — and ourselves — the constant benefits that grow from a never-ceasing climb toward greatness.

Extension always has been committed to bettering life for Nebraskans and Nebraska, a commitment seen in our beneficial and successful programs relating to agriculture, families, food safety, community and leadership, and natural resources.

Without exception, however, I believe NU Cooperative Extension programs — as good as they are — can be better.

Collins notes that greatness within an organization depends on having the *right* people doing the *right* jobs, something extension constantly strives to do.

For extension, that means knowledgeable faculty and staff interested in people and community who exhibit leadership and are creative and effective in programming. Faculty and staff who represent the University of Nebraska well, knowing extension is the front door to the university.

Another way for an organization to become great is to follow elements of the "FISH! philosophy," a high-energy, potential-releasing concept developed at an extraordinary Seattle fish market. There, employees working long hours boost each others' morale and delight customers by having fun while they fill fish orders. The concept is so popular that books and films are based on it, and thousands of organizations have adopted it.

Key elements in the FISH! philosophy are:

— choose to be positive as people are attracted to positive thinkers;

— give people more than they bargained for, and the

organization you represent will become a trademark for excellence;

— be there to make a difference in people's lives and respond as issues evolve; and

— play, because work cannot overshadow personal lives and relationships.

Despite the many issues that face us, including the budget issues of concern to us all, extension continues to do very good work, making positive differences for individuals, families and communities. Like many of the companies discussed in *Good to Great* and the FISH! philosophy, I expect extension to become even more effective and efficient.

We are on the road to greatness, and it is an exciting, worthwhile climb.

Elbert Dickey
Dean and Director
University of Nebraska
Cooperative Extension



Elbert Dickey

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On-site wastewater treatment system contractors to be certified

The development of training for private, on-site wastewater treatment system installers is one way University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is helping safeguard Nebraska's waters.

Nebraska has an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 on-site sewage treatment systems, with about 1,200 new systems being added each year, said Wayne Woldt, extension environmental engineer.

On-site wastewater treatment, usually outside of city limits, includes septic tanks with drainfields or individual home lagoons. These on-site systems serve the wastewater treatment needs of individual homes and businesses not connected to a community wastewater system. As a result, Woldt said, it is very important on-site systems be properly installed by qualified contractors and maintained by the home or business owner. Some systems are located in environmentally vulnerable areas, he added.

Two years ago, extension helped facilitate development of the Nebraska On-site Waste Water Association (NOWWA), a professional association in Nebraska for on-site wastewater treatment system installers, Woldt said. Once formed, NOWWA sought legislation that would require certification.

At that time, Woldt said, "anyone could work on on-site wastewater



Barbara Rixstine

Wayne Woldt (right), NU Cooperative Extension environmental engineer, helps train and certify contractors such as Stan Kroese of Lincoln to properly install on-site wastewater treatment systems in homes and businesses.

treatment system installation by buying or renting equipment."

Stan Kroese of Lincoln owns Dirt Works Plus Inc. and has worked in wastewater treatment excavation since 1973. Kroese agreed the training and certification are needed.

"I've gone out and done tons of repairs for people where the system was not put in correctly," which caused problems for homeowners having to have the work done again, Kroese said.

In addition, Woldt noted, poorly designed and installed systems could contaminate soil, surface water and groundwater with viruses and bacteria, which could lead to health problems.

Extension also is part of a multi-agency task force that for four years has provided educational training for wastewater treatment contractors, inspectors and homeowners statewide, Woldt said. As many as 155 people have attended a single training session.

Due to efforts of NOWWA and the task force, a new law goes into effect Jan. 1, 2004, requiring on-site wastewater certification in Nebraska.

Woldt, Jan Hygnstrom, task force project director, and Sharon Skipton,

extension educator, have been involved with wastewater education since 1996. They now are helping develop educational materials for certification that cover wastewater characteristics, soil testing, construction design, regulations, management and maintenance.

"We try to communicate the science that was drawn upon to develop the regulations, so people will understand why the regulations ask them to do things a certain way," Skipton said.

Extension's history in on-site wastewater education dates to the 1940s, Woldt said, when it collaborated with the then-U.S. Public Health Service to provide publications about on-site wastewater systems to rural residents.

"We think it's important to place extension in a provider role for research-based, non-biased information," Woldt said.

Kroese said the standardization and certification can only advance the industry.

"It's going to raise the bar, so to speak, on our profession," he said.

— Barbara Rixstine

Woldt can be contacted at (402) 472-8656; Skipton at (402) 472-3662.

Would you like to treat a friend?

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Child care training improves interactive, management skills



Shari Rosso

Kathy Bosch (right), NU Cooperative Extension family life specialist, and preschool teacher Deb Schmer look on as Cameron Rose does an activity at Calvary Lutheran School of Early Childhood in Scottsbluff. Schmer has participated in extension's early childhood professional training for 15 years.

Better child care starts with better training of early childhood professionals, and University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension education helps them improve their skills, and their interactions and relationships with children they supervise.

"I think it's important that you seek out a quality situation for your child, whether it's a licensed care center or a licensed day care home," said Kathy Bosch, NU family life specialist. "When their children are with a competent child care provider, parents can concentrate on their work rather than their child's well-being."

More than 90,000 Nebraska children are estimated to be in some type of out-of-home child care, according to the Nebraska Health and Human Services

System, which licenses child care providers. Nebraska law requires early childhood professionals to take 12 hours of training annually in order to remain licensed.

Facilities operated by licensed child care providers are inspected for such factors as food and care quality.

"It benefits the facility and the parents," Bosch said.

Extension has offered early childhood professional training for several years, and in 2002 offered 18 conferences attended by 2,822 participants. At one 2003 conference in Grand Island, 300 childhood professionals from 18 Nebraska counties took sessions on stress management, hands-on teaching activities, nutrition, food preparation, literacy, and the importance of humor and storytelling.

"We approach conference planning in two or three different ways," said Jeanette Friesen, extension educator in Hamilton and Merrick counties. "We try to have a workshop on child development. We usually include a session related to managing a child care business. We regularly offer sessions on discipline and how to deal with difficult behavior."

Friesen said conference participants reported learning new ways to direct and guide children, such as helping them learn by doing and facing the consequences of their actions.

Child care providers also may earn training hours online with extension's Internet Independent Study Course for Early Childhood Professionals. The course provides education on child guidance and discipline, safety guidelines and practices, interactions with parents and daily learning activities for children.

Most of extension's training is targeted for child care providers of preschool-age children.

"Our primary focus is the provider who has preschool children day in and day out," Friesen said, adding that older children also benefit from the teacher training.

Deb Schmer, a preschool teacher at Calvary Lutheran School of Early Childhood in Scottsbluff, began attending extension's training 15 years ago and said it has helped her develop as a teacher. She helps preschoolers prepare for school.

"We basically help to develop those kindergarteners," Schmer said. "We introduce them to the alphabet, how to write their name and also how to socialize. Children need more than just academics and we learned a lot of those other elements in our extension training."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Bosch can be contacted at (308) 632-1244; Friesen at (402) 694-6174.

'Sisters' focuses on walking, healthier eating

Helping African American women develop a healthier lifestyle by walking and learning and cooking is the goal of Sisters Together: Move More, Eat Better.

The University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension program is based on a National Institutes of Health concept. It is coordinated by Georgia Jones, NU food specialist, and Patricia Lynch, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln doctoral student, in response to health problems Jones saw in the African American community.

Jones noted approximately 48 percent of African American women are obese, a condition that puts them at risk for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and other health problems. Type 2 diabetes, for example, is 50 percent higher in African Americans than in Caucasians, Jones said.

At the monthly Sisters Together meetings, open to anyone on the UNL East Campus, participants learn components of nutrition education and healthy

meal preparation.

"The emphasis is more on nutritional foods they can cook in 30 minutes or less," Jones said.

They also do some kind of physical activity — usually walking — and learn how to include more physical activity in their everyday life.

"For some of us, finding 30 minutes a day for exercise is tough," Jones said. "So we try to help people find ways to work it in, like parking farther away at the grocery store, going down more aisles."

Lynch already has seen program benefits.

"Sisters Together members who continue to come each month have very positive things to say," she said. "Either a clothing size is smaller or they're cooking better."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Jones can be contacted at
(402) 472-3225.



Sisters Together: Move More, Eat Better, is an NU Cooperative Extension program helping women develop healthier lifestyles. Participants include, from left, Reshell Ray, Patricia Lynch, Amber Hoge, Glenda Gipson and Georgia Jones.

Player safety topic of sports turf workshop

A University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension sports turf workshop is helping keep regional sports fields in high-quality condition and safer for players.

Forty-one school, park and sports complex managers from Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado gathered this spring in Scottsbluff for a workshop presented by both NU and Colorado State University extension faculty.

The addition of soccer to many high school sports programs has increased the demands placed on sports fields, said Jim Schild, extension educator in Scotts Bluff County and a workshop coordinator.

"Extension has done groundskeeper workshops for 15 years," Schild said, "and requests for a sports turf workshop in western Nebraska came out of that."

Schild and NU turf specialist Roch Gaussoin developed workshop topics based on needs of local turf managers. Topics included turf cultivation, maintaining field quality and safety, reseeding, improved turf varieties, weed management, water audits and more. The workshop is tentatively slated for every other year.

Participants rated the workshop as excellent or very good, Schild said; nearly all said it covered major concerns and that they planned to implement newly learned techniques.

"We've found sports turf managers to be eager recipients of research-based information," Gaussoin said. "This group was very receptive and positive about the information delivered and should be able to immediately improve the safety and playability of their fields."

— **Barbara Rixstine**

Schild can be contacted at
(308) 632-1480; Gaussoin at
(402) 472-8619.

Check out
Cooperative Extension's Web site at:
<http://extension.unl.edu>

Initiative identifies potential markets for small farms

Identifying alternative markets for small- and mid-sized Midwestern farms is the goal of a four-state initiative led by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The North Central Initiative for Small Farm Profitability blends marketing and technical assistance to identify and apply practical, science-based strategies for high-value markets, said John Allen. Allen, NU Cooperative Extension rural sociologist, spearheads the four-year, grant-funded project along with Steve Taylor, director of NU's Food Processing Center.

So far the project has identified potential markets through three in-depth feasibility studies, 40 case studies demonstrating alternative business models, and the formation of 30 producer groups with similar interests, Allen said. Initial discussions have focused on such market potentials as pastured poultry, chestnuts, specialty cheeses and barley, grass-fed beef and dairy, and raising hogs in hoop houses, he said.

As of spring 2003, one southeast Nebraska wine and agritourism business had started as a result of the initiative, Allen said.

"It just takes time," he said. "I expect to see more of that occur."

NU extension educators, who already have identified initiative participants, next will provide information describing potential new opportunities in agriculture that also could strengthen communities, Allen said.

Ken Wurdeman, initiative coordinator at UNL, added that knowing the potential market is critical to raising a niche crop or developing a niche agricultural product.

Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin also are part of the initiative.

— Cheryl Alberts

Allen can be contacted at (402) 472-1772; Wurdeman at (402) 472-0807.

Drought or no, wise producers plan ahead

Whether in drought or in plenty, financial stability for beef producers lies with planning and proper management, say three University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension specialists.

Portions of western Nebraska have suffered through several years of drought, and nearly all the state was hard hit in 2002, said Jerry Volesky, range and forage specialist. Most drought-damaged pastures can recover in one to three years, but only with proper management such as deferred and limited grazing, he said.

Ensuring that sufficient grass is available for grazing is important, said Don Adams, beef specialist. The amount of forage normally is less after a drought, and cattle herds need to be managed accordingly through controlled grazing, reducing animal numbers, moving cattle or early weaning; feeding supplements also may be needed, Adams said.

"If there is a shortage of forage, ranchers need to be prepared to wean

early and if they have yearlings, be prepared to sell them early if it's dry," he said.

Ranchers selling higher than normal numbers of cattle in a drought year must plan to avoid higher income taxes, said Dick Clark, farm management specialist and interim head of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Agricultural Economics. Income from the sales of breeding livestock are subject to capital gains tax, the rate of which is higher for higher income levels. To save money, ranchers may want to defer reporting this income from the sales to the next year or two according to appropriate Internal Revenue Service code, Clark said.

"Tax management is important whether we're in a drought or not," Clark said. "They need to work with a good tax accountant."

— Lori McGinnis

Volesky and Adams can be contacted at (308) 532-3611; Clark at (402) 472-3401.

Conserve water during lawn irrigation

Wise use of water is essential when irrigating lawns and landscapes, said John Fech, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educator for Douglas/Sarpy counties.

"Water isn't free. It is a precious resource. We need to be good environmental stewards when it comes to that," Fech said.

Fech helped develop a brochure called "Make Every Drop Count on Your Yard," which is being distributed to 700 water utilities in Nebraska. The brochure explains how to save water when irrigating lawns and landscapes. For example, applying 1 inch of water on a 5,000 square-foot lawn wastes 3,125 gallons if the lawn is already adequately watered, he said.

"The biggest mistakes I see are water running into the driveway,

sidewalk or street and irrigation systems operating when it's raining," Fech said.

Fech suggests people with slopes in their yards run sprinklers manually, so they can be turned off if water begins to run off into the street.

Lawn watering should be done in early morning to reduce evaporation and so water can soak deep into the soil. Pushing a screwdriver at least 6 inches into the ground will give an indication of how deep the moisture is reaching, Fech said.

Fech suggests people can create water zones in their landscapes by planting drought-resistant native plants, and putting together plants with similar water needs.

— Lori McGinnis

Fech can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.

Technology provides valuable intelligence records for the field

Technological advances through the decades have helped production agriculture greatly increase crop yields. Now, site-specific technology assists producers in managing resources more effectively.

To help producers harness these new advances, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension provides knowledge producers can put to use in their own operations. In 2001, extension helped form the Nebraska Agricultural Technologies Association (NeATA), and annually co-sponsors an educational conference and clinics.

"We orient newcomers to what's out there and how to get started successfully," said Dave Varner, extension educator in Dodge County and NeATA secretary.

Many technological advances today revolve around site-specific, or precision, farming that uses satellites, earth stations and computers to document, map and manage areas within fields for specific treatment relating to soil type, nutrients, pest problems, crop yield and more.

Today's technology empowers producers to document production variables and, over a period of about five years, determine trends, Varner said.

"It's intelligence records for the fields," Varner said. Not only do these records help producers become better managers, they have enhanced land values at auction because buyers know the value of site-specific information, he added.

With this technology, producers have a better



understanding of what a field needs for the best crop, enabling them to apply the right treatment at the right places, even "on the fly" through the field, Varner said.

As environmental regulations become more demanding and inputs more

expensive, Steve Arneal of North Bend said he appreciates knowing his farming techniques can be more exact with precision technology. He also appreciates the opportunity to talk with other NeATA producers at the annual conference.

"As with almost any meeting, the valuable part is the people you meet who tell you what works, and what doesn't work," Arneal said.

After this year's conference Arneal bought a small hand-held computer to begin documenting fertilizer, herbicide and insecticide use for his corn, soybeans and popcorn. He then can transfer that information to his home computer to develop field maps, and prescription maps that control the application equipment.

Jerry Mulliken of Nickerson began using precision technology in 1996 to document soil sample results for himself and customers of his business, JM Crop Consulting. Mulliken now collects weed maps and records for planting and spraying.



Cheryl Alberts

Dave Varner (right), NU Cooperative Extension educator in Dodge County, works with Jerry Mulliken of Nickerson to flag soil treatments in an early-summer soybean field near Fremont. Varner and Mulliken make field maps on handheld computers, such as the one attached to Mulliken's four-wheeler.

"I was on my own pretty much to start with," said Mulliken, current NeATA president. "I've been pleasantly surprised how well extension efforts have developed — it was badly needed," he added.

Varner said NeATA now has 200 members, up from 12 in 2001. Many participants, such as Arneal, buy some precision equipment within a month of the conference, he said.

Precision agriculture still is in its infancy, Varner said. For example, while about half of all combines now sold come with yield monitors as standard equipment, he estimates one-fourth of Nebraska producers use the technology.

"Still, there's a lot of progress being made," he said. "They've decided this technology is part of their future."

— Cheryl Alberts

Varner can be contacted at (402) 727-2775.

Education goes the distance

Technology is being used to teach University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension education to more and more people, while saving travel time for both participants and instructors.

Beth Birnstihl, extension associate dean, said extension specialists and educators have expanded their educational program deliveries to include technologies such as satellite, fiber optic cable, and the Internet for Web-based curriculum and videostreaming.

Scott Brady, extension educator in the Central IV area based in Loup City, began using satellite technology four years ago to teach a short course to cow/calf producers. NU animal science specialists present material at a local television station, where images and sound are uplinked to satellite, then sent live to sites such as Ord, Chadron, Lexington, West Point, Albion and Hebron. After the satellite sessions, extension leaders at each site lead a discussion period. Brady estimates about 300 people have taken the course in this way.

Jeff Waltman of North Loup, who took the cow/calf course in Ord earlier this year, said the education delivery by satellite is efficient as well as useful.

"I don't make time to read farm publications but I will make the time to go to things like this," Waltman said.

Brady said the technology allows education and information to be presented to more people by fewer instructors.

"It allows us to bring extension education to a larger audience," Brady said. "I'm sold on the concept. I think this type of program delivery for serious learners is the future."

Fiber optic cable allows for two-way interactive distance education, which allows participants to see and talk to each other in sessions taught live from another location.

For example, Debra Schroeder, extension educator in Cuming County, uses this method in eight northeast Nebraska high schools to teach a diabetes education course.

Sheryl Carson, extension educator in

Sheridan County, also uses two-way distance learning laboratories in Panhandle public schools to teach food safety to adults and 4-H lessons to children.

"It's great because you can get people from multiple sites and it saves them travel time," Carson said.

The Internet also offers various ways for extension education to be delivered. Several online Internet courses permit participants to learn at their convenience. Other online courses are more interactive, with participants and instructors communicating directly through their computers. Videostreaming through the Internet allows extension programs such as *Market Journal* and *Backyard Farmer* to be watched live over a computer, and be archived for later viewing. And, all extension publications are online.

Extension has worked hard to increase accessibility to its educational programs, through efforts such as helping

bring faster Internet access to rural Nebraska, Birnstihl said.

"I would say Nebraska is one of the most proactive in helping clientele recognize the value of technology," she said.

— Lori McGinnis

Birnstihl can be contacted at (402) 472-2966; Brady at (308) 745-1518; Schroeder at (402) 372-6006; Carson at (308) 327-2312.



Jama Bolek

Sheryl Carson, NU Cooperative Extension educator in Sheridan County, uses technology to teach food safety via distance education. Here, she demonstrates thermometer calibration, seen on the upper right monitor.

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